The Ephebeia in the Age of Eurykleides and Mikion

This paper will discuss the extent to which the nature of the ephebeia at Athens changed under the regime of Eurykleides and Mikion. The ephebeia was a Greek institution charged with educating 18-20 year old citizens, or ephebes, who were about to enter adulthood and thus acquire citizenship rights, privileges and responsibilities. The most basic requirement of citizenship was to provide military service to the state. The ephebeia of the Lykourgan period and that of subsequent periods (when membership in the institution was voluntary) ensured that citizens received training in hoplite warfare, archery, throwing the javelin and releasing the catapult from specialized trainers in these fields.

I shall argue that while the ephebeia in the age of Eurykleides and Mikion (229-200 BCE) remained military in essence, this period marked a significant change in the institution. Young men with political and military ambitions continued to join the ephebeia and as ephebes received military training and guarded the fortresses of Athens and Peiraieus, just as generations of their predecessors. The ephebeia appears to have been more closely integrated with the traditional military structure at Athens in that the stratiotic fund was now used to finance the crowns they received at the end of their year of service and the *strategoi* announced the crowns at all of the games which the Athenians sponsored.

However, after 229 BCE, the ephebes also began to actively participate in the cults and festivals of the Athenians. I shall argue that while the ephebes played some role in Athens’ religious life in the past, this level of involvement represented a significant break with the past. Two inscriptions in particular, *SEG* 29:116 and *SEG* 26:98, are especially illustrative of the new responsibilities of the ephebes and will be examined in detail. As a result of this change, *eusebeia*, or piety, was added to the list of martial virtues for which the ephebes were routinely praised in the past. Moreover, the ephebes participated in every religious innovation that characterized Athens’ religious life during this period—the introduction of the cult and festival of the Ptolemies, Diogenes, Demos and the Charites, and Aias on the island of Salamis. In fact, the ephebic inscriptions from this period are our main source for nearly every one of the cults. So active was their involvement in the religious life of the city that their participation in it constituted an important religious innovation itself often overlooked by previous scholars.

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